Strategic partnership with RUSSIA

616. SHRI SABIR ALI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to further consolidate strategic partnership wiht Russia; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Rashtrapatiji will pay a State Visit to Russia in September 2009. The India-Russia Annual Summit meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia will take place in Moscow in December 2009. The 15th session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific Technological and Cultural Cooperation, co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia will take place in Moscow in October 2009. The 9th session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC), co-chaired by the Defence Ministers of India and Russia will take place in Moscow in October 2009. During these visits, discussions will take place with the Russian leadership on all strategic areas of bilateral cooperation with Russia such as defence, space, energy including nuclear energy, science & technology and trade & economy.

Border dispute with Nepal

†617. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any border dispute between India and Nepal;

(b) if so, the names of the areas and the extent of land, and the time since when it has been under dispute;

(c) the total number of check posts on Nepal border;

(d) whether there is any fencing on the border-line;

(e) whether the earlier Nepal Government had in the first instance alleged that India had encroached upon some of its land;

(f) if so, in what manner it was responded to; and

(g) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): (a) and (b) Strip maps covering about ninety six percent of the India-Nepal boundary have been jointly finalised by the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) on Boundary Matters, and initialled. There are, however, differences of perception in some areas on the alignment of boundary between India and Nepal. Differences exist in areas such as Narsahi -Susta in Bihar and Kalapani in Uttarakhand. The shifting of course in Susta region of the Gandak river, the mid-stream of which formed the boundary under the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816, has resulted in claims by Nepal in this segment.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) There are twenty two mutually agreed Land Customs Stations along the India-Nepal border with provision for customs check-posts. Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) has four hundred and forty six Border Out Posts on the India-Nepal border. There are five posts along the border where immigration is done in respect of third country nationals.

(d) No.

(e) No.

(f) and (g) Do not arise.

Delay in issuing of Passport

†618. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it has been brought to the notice of Government that due to delay in issuing of passport in definite period, less number of passports are being issued;

(b) whether new rules are being framed in consultation with Ministry of Home Affairs in this regard; and

(c) if so, the main features thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SHASHI THAROOR): (a) Ministry is aware that in a few Passport Offices there is delay in issuing passports and remedial measures are being taken so that delays are avoided.

(b) and (c) Yes. The Government had entrusted the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG), Hyderabad, with the task of undertaking a time-bound study on the passport issuance system, including its IT aspects, with the objective of delivering passport-related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible and reliable manner. The Government accepted the NISG report as a result of which the "Passport Seva Project" has been launched. The proposal is to have 77 Passport Seva Kendras all over the country where the non-sovereign functions involved in the passport issuance process, such as the initial scrutiny of the application forms, acceptance of fee, scanning of the documents, taking photos etc, will be performed by the selected Service Provider. The sensitive activities, such as police verification, printing and dispatch of passports, will be performed by Government staff. The project is expected to result in the issue of passports within three days, and where police verification is required, within three days after completion of the verification process. The Project is expected to be implemented fully to cover the entire country by the middle of 2010.

Agreement to fight Terrorism

619. SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether treaties/agreements have been made with various countries for mutual cooperation in combating the growing menace of terrorism;

(b) if so, the details thereof specifying areas of joint-working, if any, envisaged in such agreements with respective countries;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.